

Introduction: How the Happy Few Might Become the Competent Many

William L. Heward
The Ohio State University

Richard W. Malott
Western Michigan University

Most readers of this journal believe that widespread, competent application of behavior analysis can help create a better world. Empirical support for this belief rests in the applied research demonstrating how behavior analysis can help people; theoretical support is found in the conceptual extensions of both basic and applied research. However, behavior analysis is little-used in solving the biggest problems of the day. The discrepancy between the potential and real-world application of behavior analysis has caused many among us to lament "Why aren't *they* (government and community leaders, educators, business people, etc.) using our good stuff more often? Can't *they* see that it will help them to — (the choices seem nearly endless: make our streets safer, teach every child to read and play cooperatively, provide more jobs and increase productivity, etc.)?"

The behavior analysis literature includes many papers that analyze, discuss, and debate the limited acceptance and practice of the philosophy and methods of behavior analysis. Examination of this literature suggests one fundamental conclusion: The behavior involved in understanding radical behaviorism and systematically applying the technology derived from the science of behavior is too seldom selected by naturally occurring contingencies. Skinner wrote extensively on three major reasons why this may be so: (a) Radical behaviorism is counterintuitive

to everyday logic about the variables that influence behavior (e.g., *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, Skinner, 1974, p. 1). (b) The effective use of behavioral procedures competes poorly against naturally occurring contingencies that support other means of controlling behavior (e.g., the immediate effects of punishing others typically win out over the delayed, but ultimately more beneficial, effects of positive reinforcement; Skinner, 1953; in fact, Foxx, 1992, suggests that the natural contingencies are so skewed in favor of methods of aversive control that the use of positive reinforcement might be considered "an unnatural act"). (c) Both the philosophy of radical behaviorism and the use of behavioral procedures are frowned upon by cultural practices predicated on the literature of freedom and dignity (Skinner, 1971).

Understandably, we behavior analysts have focused on what we do best: the discovery of behavior-environment relations and the development, extension, and refinement of a behavior-change technology based on those relations. But if behavior analysis is to contribute significantly to a better world, then more people must understand and support behavior analysis, practice its application in systematic and competent ways, and do the research needed to further basic and applied behavior analysis. To state it another way, behavior analysts have discovered and validated a technology that can help to improve the human condition, but there are too few people supporting, using, and advancing that technology.

Address correspondence concerning this article to R. W. Malott, Department of Psychology, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008.

To increase the impact of behavior analysis, perhaps three related and complementary types of behavior analysis repertoires are needed by three different types of people: (a) the general public, who, if properly exposed to the wonders and potential of behavior analysis, may be more supportive of its application in their communities; (b) practitioners, who can serve their respective professions better by competently using behavior analysis technology; and (c) scientists and researchers, whose job it is to further develop and extend the theoretical and empirical boundaries of behavior analysis.

NEEDED: MORE AND BETTER TEACHING OF BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

But how are all these people to acquire this knowledge and skill? With the help of teachers of behavior analysis. Teachers of behavior analysis are primarily college and university professors. Teaching behavior analysis is just one of the many things these people do. For example, because they comprise perhaps 90% or more of the scientist and researcher group, they are responsible for the continued development of the science and technology itself. As a result, too little time may be left to teach others.

As scientists and practitioners of behavior analysis, we know that an effective technology of teaching behavior analysis depends on high-quality research and development to improve this technology. Yet, the behavior analysis community has devoted relatively little of its total research and development effort to the teaching of behavior analysis. If the science and technology of behavior analysis are to make a significant contribution to humanity, perhaps research and development on how to teach behavior analysis should be a major concern of our field.

THE SPECIAL SECTION ON TEACHING BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

The Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA) seems to agree. First, ABA

has established the Teaching Behavior Analysis Special Interest Group and the Educational Board. The special interest group sponsors symposia and poster sessions at the annual ABA convention and publishes a newsletter. The Education Board is beginning to address the recruitment, training, and professional placement of behavior analysts. (Readers interested in participating in either group can contact the second author.)

Second, ABA is publishing special sections on teaching behavior analysis in this and the next issue of *The Behavior Analyst*. The 10 papers published here are of three general types: (a) curriculum and program organization (Ackley & Bailey; Shook, Hartsfield, & Hemingway); (b) instructional methods and materials specific to behavior analysis (Mattaini; Chisholm & Cook; Goldwater & Acker; Michael & Shafer; Carr, Taylor, & Austin; Karp); and (c) general instructional methods that have particular appeal or relevance to the teaching of behavior analysis (Barbetta & Skaruppa; Dardig). If the papers in this special section inspire more of us to try different things, to tinker around with our teaching much in the way that proved so successful for Skinner (1956), their authors will have made an important contribution to behavior analysis.

Perhaps the special section's most important goal is to help to focus our field's attention on the importance of developing more effective methods, curricula, and training programs in behavior analysis. In turn, this might serve to prompt all of us in behavior analysis to recognize, learn about, and make use of—by adopting, adapting, extending, and refining—more of the good information on effective teaching that already exists. There is little doubt that the overall effectiveness of teaching in behavior analysis would be increased if we did a better job of incorporating more strategies and tactics from the existing knowledge base, both in our discipline's own literature on effective teaching (e.g., *Journal of Ap-*

plied Behavior Analysis, Journal of Behavioral Education) and in the general and special education literature at all levels (e.g., *Effective School Practices, Elementary School Journal, Remedial and Special Education, Journal of Excellence in College Teaching*).

AND THEN SOMEDAY?

A defining characteristic of applied behavior analysis is its focus on socially significant behavior—behavior that makes a difference in the lives of the people who participate. We can think of no response class more socially significant than those involved in teaching behavior analysis and the behavior changes that teaching produces. For behavior analysis to make its optimal contribution to the well-being of humanity, we may need to invest as much effort to the dissemination of our

science and technology as we do to its further development. As our discipline devotes increasing effort and resources to extending the reach and effectiveness of teaching behavior analysis, we happy few may someday become the competent many. The combined efforts of many just might help to save the day.

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